

Winter 2024

# CUESTA

Magazine & Annual Report





WINTER 2024  
CUESTA COLLEGE  
MAGAZINE + ANNUAL REPORT

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Cuesta College welcomes eighteen  
talented tenure-track faculty (pg. 5)



A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dr. Jill Stearns

Dear Cuesta College community,

Your support of the Cuesta College Foundation changes student lives. The 2-year Cuesta Promise brings educational dreams to reality for our students. Your support of equity, arts, and athletics encourages student engagement and fosters belonging.

In this edition, we spotlight a justice-impacted student, our newest cohort of tenure track faculty members, and the fall 2025 launch of a 2 + 2 Liberal Studies program partnership with Cal Poly.

Highlighted features include the new Affinity Center, recent award winners, Rising Scholars, and the 10 year anniversary of the Cuesta Promise. The year in review provides a beautiful summary of top moments.

In this edition, we extend our gratitude to business partner United Staffing Associates. Messages from Cuesta College's Foundation Board President, Advancement Executive Director, and Athletics Director are also included.

You are a valued member of the Cuesta College community. Thank you for your dedicated support of Cuesta students!

Warm regards,

Jill Stearns, Ph.D.  
Superintendent/President





## CAL POLY AT CUESTA

# Cuesta College and Cal Poly Launch 2+2 Program for Aspiring Teachers

Cuesta College and Cal Poly have partnered to create an innovative 2+2 Liberal Studies program to address California's growing demand for credentialed teachers. Through this collaboration, students can complete two years at Cuesta College before transitioning to Cal Poly to finish their upper-division coursework—all while staying on the Cuesta College campus.

Designed to correspond directly with Cal Poly's teacher preparation curriculum, this program awards students a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies with a Child Development concentration. According to the faculty Division Chair of the Education Department, Cherie Moore, the Liberal Studies degree prepares students specifically for teaching preschool through sixth grade and includes additional coursework in child development. This concentration aligns with California's recent credentialing requirements for transitional kindergarten (TK) teachers, who now need an additional 24 units in child development.

The program offers flexibility for students who work during the day, with evening classes scheduled at Cuesta College. Moore highlighted the advantage for paraprofessionals and early childhood educators who wish to pursue a teaching credential while continuing to work. The evening class format provides them with an accessible pathway to earn a four-year degree without relocating or compromising employment.

The 2+2 program is structured as a cohort model, ensuring students follow a streamlined pathway to complete their degree in four years. By offering a clear, cohesive course sequence, the program prevents the delays students may face with traditional transfer paths, where completing a bachelor's degree may take more than four years. This carefully planned sequence is especially beneficial given California's critical teacher shortage, which has created demand for highly qualified educators, particularly in the TK-3 grade range.

With a strong foundation in child development, hands-on experience, and cohort support, students in the 2+2 program are well-equipped for a career in teaching. They'll participate in classroom observations and lab-based science and math courses for elementary education and receive guidance on earning both the multiple-subject teaching credential and the new PK-3 credential, qualifying them to teach transitional kindergarten through sixth grade.

Applications are open now for students entering the program's upper-division phase in Fall 2025. Interested applicants are encouraged to meet with a Cuesta College counselor to ensure they meet the program's specific course requirements. With combined resources from Cuesta College and Cal Poly, students benefit from a supportive educational experience that addresses local and statewide teacher shortages. This unique partnership builds on Cuesta's and Cal Poly's strengths and reflects a forward-thinking approach to teacher training tailored to today's educational needs.

For more information about the Cuesta College and Cal Poly 2+2 Liberal Studies Program, please contact Cherie Moore at [cmoore@cuesta.edu](mailto:cmoore@cuesta.edu).

# Cuesta College's Affinity Programs Center: A New Home for Belonging and Inclusion

The newly opened Affinity Programs Center at Cuesta College marks a welcome addition to campus life, fostering a space where diversity, equity, and inclusivity are at the forefront. The idea for the center originated from former Student Trustee and Associated Students of Cuesta College President Dawn Grillo during the 2021-2022 academic year. Grillo's vision was simple yet powerful: to create a space where students could connect, find community, and feel truly seen. The project gained momentum with the support of Assistant Superintendent and Vice President of Student Success & Support Programs, Dr. Elizabeth Coria. Dr. Coria then entrusted the project to Associate Dean of Student Equity Initiative and Special Programs Dr. Araceli Espinoza-Wade to bring it to life.

The Affinity Programs Center's mission is to be a safe, welcoming space for students of all backgrounds and identities, particularly those from minoritized communities. It is a space that has been carefully planned and prepared, with students at the heart of every decision. Located in the college library, the center includes dedicated staff and facilities designed to support students practically and emotionally. The center's furniture, decor, and programming ideas are all shaped by student feedback, reflecting its purpose: to create a true sense of belonging on campus.

Dr. Espinoza-Wade explains that the acronym SEE embodies the Affinity Programs Center's mission: to Support, Embrace, and Empower students. With an emphasis on student engagement and community-building, the Affinity Programs Center aligns with Cuesta's Student Equity Plan. "When students feel that they belong, they're more likely to stay engaged on campus," Dr. Espinoza-Wade said. "Our goal is to create that sense of connection and validation that makes students feel comfortable and confident in being themselves."

Programming at the center emphasizes diverse experiences and intersectionality, recognizing the importance of engaging students from all walks of life. The center's staff is building a robust calendar of events that promotes inclusivity through informal mixers, identity-focused discussions, and community-building activities.

Looking ahead, Dr. Espinoza-Wade envisions the Affinity Programs Center as an evolving resource that strengthens Cuesta's ongoing commitment to inclusivity. "This center is about more than just providing a space," she said. "It's about ensuring every student feels welcomed, supported, and seen by both staff and peers."

As the Affinity Programs Center grows, its impact on Cuesta College promises to be lasting, setting a new standard for a campus culture where all students are valued and empowered.

For more information about the Affinity Programs Center, please contact Affinity Programs Supervisor Michaela McLaughlin at [equityinitiatives@cuesta.edu](mailto:equityinitiatives@cuesta.edu).





# Cuesta College Welcomes New Tenure-Track Faculty



Cuesta College is excited to welcome eighteen talented tenure-track faculty who bring their expertise, innovation, and passion to our academic community. These educators are dedicated to student success and advancing the college's mission of excellence in education. We look forward to their contributions in shaping Cuesta College's future.

**Seth Abugho | Business Education**

**Jamie Bettencourt | Counseling Services**

**Devon Bradley | Biological Sciences**

**Tafadzwa Dube | Mathematics**

**Matthew Fox | Counseling Services**

**Karen Geida | Counseling Services**

**Michele Haley | Applied Behavioral Sciences**

**Gena Henderson | Nursing & Allied Health**

**Billy Keniston | Social Sciences**

**Fred Krynen | Physical Sciences**

**Robyn Matteson | Nursing & Allied Health**

**Jonathan Okerblom | Biological Sciences**

**Allison Sanchez | Nursing & Allied Health**

**Frank Schweitzer | Skilled Trades & Technology**

**Michelle Sheen | Movement & Health Sciences**

**Jeremy Shermak | Languages & Communication**

**Erik Veach | Physical Sciences**

**Michael Wilson | Skilled Trades & Technology**



# Breaking Barriers and Building Futures

## CUESTA COLLEGE'S RISING SCHOLARS PROGRAM



We sat down with Devin Kutil, Program Coordinator of the Rising Scholars Program, to explore the work supporting justice-impacted individuals at Cuesta College. Rising Scholars offers more than just educational opportunities—it provides hope, purpose, and a pathway to a brighter future for those facing incarceration or systemic barriers. Devin shares insights into the program's origins, its evolution to serve diverse communities, and its impact on students, their families, and society.

### **Q: What is the Rising Scholars Program?**

Rising Scholars aims to support justice-impacted individuals by breaking down the barriers they face in accessing education and stable employment. The program initially focused on reducing recidivism but now addresses broader goals, providing tools and resources to help students reintegrate into society. We're not only serving those currently incarcerated but also reaching families, at-risk youth, and individuals indirectly affected by the justice system. With opportunities like earning degrees and sentence reductions through education, Rising Scholars profoundly impacts individuals and communities, building pathways to success and reducing the likelihood of incarceration.

### **Q: Why was the Rising Scholars Program established at Cuesta College, and what is its current focus?**

Cuesta's Rising Scholars Program began by focusing on educating inmates at the California Men's Colony (CMC). Through a partnership with CMC, we offered college courses to support incarcerated students' reintegration. Recently, we've expanded to serve juvenile justice-involved and at-risk youth, aiming for early intervention. We want to provide support before incarceration occurs by proactively engaging with students and families, breaking cycles of criminal justice involvement. We've also established a network with regional colleges like Allan Hancock, Oxnard, and Ventura, strengthening Central Coast resources for justice-impacted students.

### **Q: How have you seen the impact of the Rising Scholars Program on students and families?**

The impact has been profound. Even individuals facing lifelong sentences find purpose and self-growth at CMC through education. They become mentors, offering guidance to younger inmates and fostering a sense of community and change. For those released, practical skills like culinary training and certifications allow them to find employment in the food industry and fire camps. It's transformative for them and entire communities, turning former barriers into pathways. The pride in education and newfound purpose positively affects students' families, igniting hope and breaking generational cycles of disadvantage.

### **Q: How does Cuesta College implement Rising Scholars' guiding principles to support students?**

Cuesta embraces a student-centered, trauma-informed approach, ensuring students have a voice in shaping their education. We work closely with each student to identify personal goals and build a supportive plan tailored to their needs. Through regular check-ins and wrap-around services, we guide students in setting realistic academic and career pathways, connecting them with faculty, counselors, and resources like Basic Needs. Our program is hands-on, helping students navigate challenges, providing mentorship, and advocating for them. Ultimately, this support creates community, promoting resilience and confidence as they achieve educational and personal growth.

*Continued on next page...*





### Q: What is your hope for the future of the Rising Scholars Program?

My hope for the Rising Scholars Program is to create a pipeline of opportunity and healing for justice-impacted individuals and their families. Being justice-impacted isn't a far degree of separation for many people—it's a part of our cultural fabric. When we openly acknowledge this, we can recognize the need for programs like this and their potential to break down barriers and offer second chances.

By 2025, we envision a thriving Rising Scholars Center—a welcoming, student-driven hub on campus. It will be a place to access academic resources, connect with others who understand your journey, and feel safe and supported. This center will reflect the heart of our mission: building community and empowering students to share their voices.

Expanding our capacity is essential. We're focused on growing our programs for justice-impacted populations, from juvenile justice to those transitioning from incarceration at the California Men's Colony. We currently have about 275 students enrolled, with a waitlist of over 300.

Ultimately, I want to unite students, families, and stakeholders to promote meaningful conversations, create systemic change, and ensure no one feels left behind. This program isn't just about education—it's about transforming lives and communities.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

# Rising Above: Isaac's Journey Through the Rising Scholars Program



Isaac Pummill's story is one of resilience, lifted by the support of Cuesta College's Rising Scholars Program. As a justice-impacted student, Isaac has pursued a new path through education, finding empowerment and purpose at Cuesta College. His journey reveals the challenges justice-impacted individuals often face and how determination and a sense of community can create meaningful change.

Isaac is a first-year business administration student and new senator in the Associated Students of Cuesta College (ASCC). He grew up in Shandon and Templeton, and after completing high school, he faced a period of uncertainty that ultimately led him to negative influences. In 2021, Isaac was convicted of unlawfully discharging a firearm, serving two years in prison. "I didn't exactly know what direction to take," he said, describing a time when he felt lost. But the experience became a turning point, prompting him to look for a fresh start.

After his release, Isaac hoped his past wouldn't hold him back. However, he encountered significant barriers, as his record led to rescinded job offers and other setbacks. "I thought things would change instantly, that I'd just press play, and life would return to normal," he said. Determined to build a new future, he sought mentors who encouraged him to pursue education. With their guidance, he found his way to Cuesta College, where he felt accepted and supported.

Enrolling at Cuesta introduced him to the Rising Scholars Program, which provides resources and a safe environment for justice-impacted students like him. Rising Scholars helps with essentials such as books and parking permits and creating an inclusive, nonjudgmental atmosphere. "From day one, Cuesta has been welcoming, and faculty and staff have been genuinely helpful and enthusiastic," Isaac shared, emphasizing how the program has helped him find stability and a sense of belonging.

He commends Rising Scholars staff, such as Devin Kutil and Becci Carter, for their dedication to students' success. He emphasizes that even though the program is relatively new, it has already made a significant impact. He hopes it will grow to include a more robust community network for justice-impacted individuals, nurturing an environment of mutual support.

Isaac's goals are ambitious but clear: he plans to transfer to a four-year university, potentially pursuing an MBA. He is also seeking expungement, a certificate of rehabilitation, and a potential governor's pardon. "Statistically, less than 5% of people who've been incarcerated in state prison ever attain a bachelor's degree," he explained. "That's why programs like Rising Scholars are so important – they provide the tools and support we need to overcome those odds."

Through the Rising Scholars Program, Isaac has redefined his own path and contributed to a cultural shift that values growth, accountability, and second chances. "Let's own our journeys and take charge," he said. "We're in control of our future."



## FACES & PLACES

### Fall 2024 Opening Day Awards



#### 2024 CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR

Julie Salgado and Michael Teehee



#### DR. MARIE E. ROSENWASSER PRESIDENT'S LEADERSHIP AWARD

Wes Martin and Gladis Villalpando



#### 2024 TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

Dr. Matthew Davis

#### 2024 ACADEMIC EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Beth Ann Dumas

## FACES & PLACES



### FIRST GENERATION CELEBRATION

Cuesta College honored the achievements of its first-generation college students, faculty, and staff with a First Generation Celebration on November 5th and 6th. Organized by the Office of Student Equity and Success, this year's events focused on first-generation student parents making strides toward their educational goals while setting inspiring examples for their families.

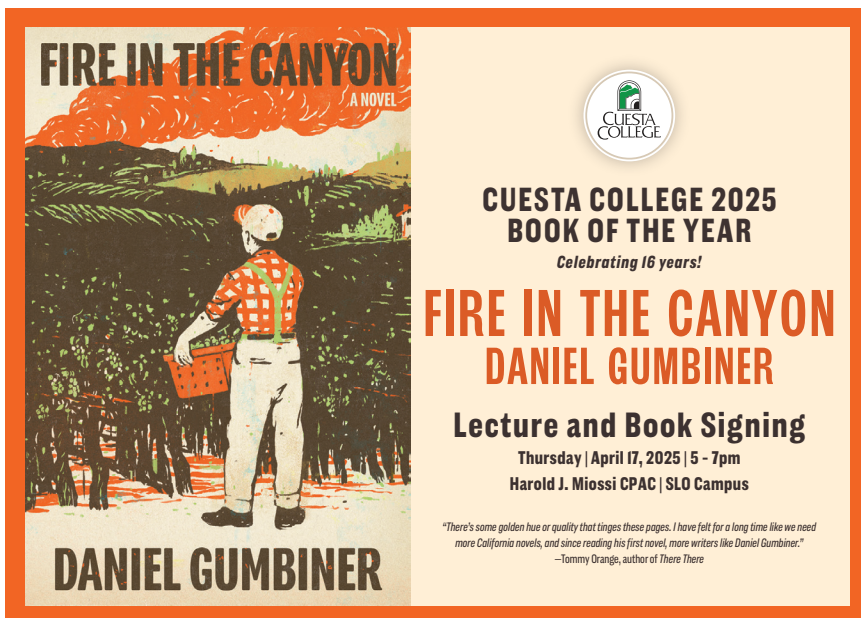


### PATRIOT DAY

On Patriot Day, Cuesta College gathered to honor the lives lost on September 11, 2001, and pay tribute to the bravery of first responders and the resilience of the American people. Thank you to our campus community, Cuesta College Police, Paramedic/EMT students, Cal Fire, Army National Guard, District Attorney's Office, and community partners for joining us in remembrance.



## Book of the Year 2025



The 2025 Cuesta College Book of the Year is *Fire in the Canyon* by National Book Award nominee Daniel Gumbiner. Named a *New Yorker* Best Book of 2023, this compelling novel follows a California grape-grower and his family as they navigate the devastating effects of a climate disaster that disrupts their quiet lives. Join us for an engaging lecture and book signing with the author on Thursday, April 17, 2025, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at the Harold J. Miossi Cultural & Performing Arts Center. Tickets go on sale February 1, 2025, at [tickets.cuesta.edu](https://tickets.cuesta.edu). General admission is \$20, and Cuesta students attend for free.

## Jamil Hellu

*Face to Face*, a solo exhibition by acclaimed artist Jamil Hellu, is on display at the Harold J. Miossi Art Gallery from October 24 to December 8. The exhibition features photographs and sculptures, highlighting Hellu's diverse artistic practice. *Face to Face* explores themes of identity, queerness, and self-representation through intimate, carefully crafted imagery and three-dimensional forms. An artist talk with Hellu is available to view at [bit.ly/jamilhellu](https://bit.ly/jamilhellu).

The Harold J. Miossi Art Gallery is in Room 7170 on the San Luis Obispo campus. Admission to the gallery is free. Please visit the gallery webpage or call (805) 546-3202 for a schedule of exhibits and hours of operation.





## Bob Mariucci



Cougar Fans,

It's been an amazing Fall Sports season and it's been a joy to watch our talented student athletes in action. Our Men's and Women's Cross-Country teams are both getting ready for the Western State Conference Championships and, while the men boast an all-freshman squad, the women's team, with Madeline Fletcher (2021) and Elle Casselman (2024), is led by two former Cuesta College Athletes of the Year. Women's Soccer has gotten off to a good start as they compete against one of the toughest conferences in the State. Women's Volleyball is enjoying the fruits of outside hitter Bailey Woodside's record-breaking season. She has already set Cuesta's career record for kills and is closing in on her own record for kills in a season that she set last year. The Men's Water Polo team is fresh off back-to-back State Final Four appearances and chasing the programs 44th straight playoff berth and 30th conference title, led by All-Conference returners Andonis Petroustas, Oliver Finley and Austin Majus, who all achieved their 100th career goals on the same weekend. The Women's Water Polo team is also battling for a conference title and their third straight playoff berth under Coach Rachel Gruetzmacher, who resurrected a program that played only nine contests in the two years prior to her arrival. Cuesta Wrestling is always competitive on the mats and will host the State's most prestigious meet with its

21st Meathead Movers Invitational this year. And as the calendar turns to Winter, we're excited about the beginning of the Men's and Women's Basketball season.

As always, I also want to congratulate our student athletes on the outstanding job they are doing in the classroom. This past Spring all nine programs made Cuesta's Team Honor Roll by achieving an accumulative team 3.0 GPA or better- Men's & Women's Basketball, Men's & Women's Track, Baseball, Softball, Men's & Women's Swimming, and Cuesta Athletics, newest sport Beach Volleyball.

Please enjoy some of the great action shots of our student athletes competing on campus this past Fall. I hope to see you at the games this upcoming semester.

Go Cougars!

**Bob Mariucci**

Director of Athletics





## 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

Cuesta College's RN graduating class of 2023 ranked number one for students passing the NCLEX, which allows nursing graduates to be licensed as a registered nurse in the U.S. This achievement not only makes Cuesta College the top-ranked program within California but also places it first among 2,219 Registered Nursing programs (BSN, Associate Degree, or Diploma) across the United States.

Cuesta College's Music Faculty Concert has become a cherished tradition in San Luis Obispo County, showcasing the incredible talent of the college's music faculty while raising funds for the music scholarship program. This year marked a significant milestone as the Performing Arts Department celebrated 20 years of fostering student success and providing opportunities for students to build their futures in music.

Cuesta College debuted The Human Library® on its San Luis Obispo campus on March 6. The Human Library® started in Denmark over 20 years ago and has grown to be a global movement to challenge stereotypes and prejudices through meaningful dialogue in a safe and inclusive environment. The event was made possible through a partnership with the Cuesta College Library, Cuesta College Student Health Services, and San Luis Obispo County Behavioral Health.

### JANUARY



### FEBRUARY



### MARCH



### JULY

The Harold J. Miossi Art Gallery at Cuesta College hosted *Between Ordinary*, an exhibition that featured the works of acclaimed artist Marie Schoeff. The exhibition ran from July 17 to Aug. 16. Schoeff's art invites viewers to engage with their surroundings through a lens of gentle, precise observation.



### AUGUST

On August 1, the Cuesta College Foundation hosted its 35th Annual Scholarship Reception, honoring the achievements of our 359 scholarship recipients. Thanks to the contributions of our generous scholarship donors, we've awarded a record-breaking 629 scholarships, totaling \$659,034!



### SEPTEMBER

Cuesta College announced that its College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) and Dual Enrollment programs have the highest participation rate in California (UC Davis Wheelhouse Report). These programs offer high school students the chance to earn both high school and college credits simultaneously through CCAP partnerships with nine local districts and fourteen high schools throughout San Luis Obispo County.

Cuesta College hosted the return of Book of the Year events with celebrated queer Latinx author, poet, and artist Myriam Gurba. A Santa Maria native, Gurba appeared in person for a lecture and book signing on Thursday, Apr. 18, at the CPAC Mainstage. Gurba shared insights into her works, including her recent essay collection, *Creep: Accusations and Confessions*. This provocative collection explores the creep of toxicity and negativity that permeates our lives.

At the 59th Commencement Ceremony on May 17, Cuesta College celebrated the achievements of 1,172 exceptional graduating students. Together, they earned a total of 1,543 degrees, including 690 associate in arts, 201 associate in science, 391 associate in arts for transfer, and 261 associate in science for transfer.

The inaugural cohort of Cuesta College's AVMT program had the opportunity to showcase their skills at a Career Day hosted by ACI Jet. The event attracted eleven prominent industry employers, including Bombardier, SpaceX, Edge Autonomy, Joby Aviation, Pratt & Whitney, Sun Air Jets, and General Atomics. This networking experience is invaluable for AMT graduates entering a rapidly growing and competitive field.

## APRIL



## MAY



## JUNE



## OCTOBER

Student Life & Leadership curated an exciting lineup of events for the fall semester. Highlights from October included the Club Fair, Civic Engagement & UndocuAlly Resource Fair, Breast Cancer Awareness Day in collaboration with Men's Water Polo, a Halloween Costume Contest, and a vibrant Día de los Muertos Celebration.

## NOVEMBER

Freshman Weston Greenelsh is a cross country state champion! Weston claimed the state title with a 20:38.1 finish at the 2024 CCCAA State Championship in Fresno's Woodward Park, becoming Cuesta College's first since Sean McDermott in 2016. A standout from SLO High, Weston was the Cougars' top finisher all season and led the pack in eight of his starts. Freshman JP Walsh also earned a spot at the state meet and finished 10th in a field of 192 runners. Go Cougars!

## DECEMBER

On December 6, Cuesta College participated in the 48th Annual Downtown SLO Holiday Parade! This year's theme was Whimsical Wonderland. Student representatives from ASCC, Athletics, College Corps, MESA, and SACNAS participated in the event.



# Keeping the Promise: 10-Year Anniversary | Promise Day

Sometimes, it just takes one person to change thousands of lives in our community. Ok, really, it took two. It took someone with a vision AND someone to actually make it happen.

Twelve years ago, the visionary was President Gil Stork, who took the idea of free community college from our sister school in Ventura and held onto it for a few years. He dreamed of a way to remove the burden of tuition for our local families. And the philanthropist who made it happen was Leeta Dovica, who left Cuesta College in her estate to support scholarships. When her lawyer called the Cuesta College Foundation, her gift of \$8 million changed access to higher education in San Luis Obispo County.

Today, we celebrate the tenth year of the Cuesta College Promise. Who knew all those years ago how broad that impact would be? In 2014, 650 students came for one year of free college. In 2024, over 1,000 students are at Cuesta getting two years of free college with new student success and support programs. Over the past ten years, almost 10,000 local high school graduates have come to Cuesta tuition-free to smooth the path to a degree or a career for themselves and their families. And the program keeps growing.

That in and of itself is amazing, but there are those unexpected moments when you know that the impact is broader than the numbers.

## MOMENT 1

When the college studied the impact of a year of free tuition, we saw that not as many students were staying. Our new challenge was to raise funds to add a second year to extend that access. As soon as the goal was announced, Howard Carroll of The Harold J. Miossi Trust stepped up to pledge \$1 million to the effort. And so many in the community followed to see that vision become reality in 2018.

## MOMENT 2

Cuesta College representatives spoke at state and national conferences to promote the impacts of free college programs. Leading the way all the way to the White House, and a California roundtable hosted by the Obama Administration in 2016 to explore the idea of a National Promise program.

## MOMENT 3

Even before the pandemic, mental health and stress issues weigh down seniors in our local high schools as they apply and wait for acceptance letters and financial aid offers from colleges. In one conversation, a SLO High Senior shared that choosing to come to Cuesta on the Promise relieved him of all of that stress. He said that making the smart choice to come to Cuesta early in his Senior year helped him to enjoy his last year of high school and plan for his future while his friends were in worrying limbo.

This amazing program could not have happened without bringing together the college and the community. As we celebrate the Promise's ten-year anniversary, we look forward to keeping this promise going for decades to come and envisioning what other partnerships we can launch together.



Photos from Promise Day, October 24th, 2024





 **CUESTA  
COLLEGE**

**CUESTA  
COLLEGE  
PROMISE**

**TWO YEARS FREE!**



# Partnering for Success: United Staffing Associates and Cuesta College



In the landscape of business partnerships, United Staffing Associates (United Staffing) stands out as a model of commitment and community engagement. As one of Cuesta College's Champion Level Business Partners, United Staffing has demonstrated strong dedication to enhancing educational opportunities and addressing the region's workforce needs. Their recent role as a matching partner for Giving Tuesday exemplifies their spirit of generosity. This year, United Staffing contributed half of the Cuesta College Foundation's \$25,000 goal for the Cuesta Fund, a vital resource that supports the college's most urgent needs and provides financial aid to students.

Founded in 2002 by David Elson, United Staffing emerged from his desire to redefine the staffing industry through exceptional customer service and a strong emphasis on respect and fairness for employees. Over the next two decades, United Staffing grew exponentially, evolving from a small office in Templeton, to an expansive network of 15 branches across California and Nevada.

"Our success is a testament to the dedication of our multi-talented staff, loyal clients, and strong partnerships," said Elson. His leadership philosophy blends innovation with a personal touch—early promotional efforts famously included delivering homemade desserts to local businesses, an approach that reflected United Staffing's commitment to building authentic relationships.

United Staffing provides tailored staffing solutions for businesses of all sizes and across a wide array of industries. Their recruiting services range from temporary staffing, temp-to-hire, and direct placement as well as providing expert human resources support, safety training, and risk management consulting. Each branch reflects the needs of its local community, specializing in high-volume and seasonal staffing in sectors such as light industrial, agriculture, logistics, and manufacturing.

"I remember how difficult it was to work and attend school at the same time before I started my business," Elson said. "Supporting Cuesta College with programs like the Cuesta Fund and the Theatre Department are just some of the ways that United Staffing can do our part to support current and future students as they work hard to continue their advancement and reach for their dreams."

United Staffing's collaboration with Cuesta College underscores their shared mission to empower individuals through education and employment. By investing in students and the community, they not only strengthen the local workforce but also inspire the next generation of leaders. Together, Cuesta College and United Staffing Associates exemplify the power of partnership in driving regional progress.

# Thank You for Partnering with Cuesta College!

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### CHAMPION LEVEL

ACI Jet  
Bank of America  
Barnes & Noble College  
CoastHills Credit Union  
Pacific Western Bank  
PG&E  
Thoma Electric  
United Staffing Associates

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### MENTOR LEVEL

19six Architects  
Ancient Peaks Winery  
Corvus Wealth Advisors  
EECU  
Harvey's Honey Huts  
Kon Tiki Inn  
Math TV and XYZ Textbooks  
Mechanics Bank  
San Luis Butane/Delta Liquid Energy

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### SUPPORTER LEVEL

All About Events  
E.C. Loomis Insurance Associates  
Glenn Burdette  
Kitchell Construction  
Klassen Corporation  
Meathead Movers  
Sinton Helicopters  
Twin Cities Community Hospital  
Wacker Wealth Partners

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### ASSOCIATE LEVEL

Absolution Cellars  
American Riviera Bank  
Baker Wine & Grape Analysis  
Boone Printing & Graphics  
CIO Solutions  
Coles Cattle Company  
Columbia College  
Farm Supply Company  
Hinson's Tire Pros  
Home Motors  
Hotel Buena Vista  
Idler's Home  
Kona's Deli  
Lacey Livestock  
Morris & Garritano Insurance  
Oaks Independent Insurance Solutions  
Paso Robles Country Waste and Recycle  
Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance  
Rachell Rae Designs  
Rolph Family Vineyard  
Samata Management  
San Luis Ambulance Service  
SESLOC Federal Credit Union  
Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center  
SLOCAL Roots  
Talley Farms  
Talley Vineyards  
Wilde Wealth Management Group  
Woodstock's Pizza

*As of 10/2024*



# Carol Olsen: Transformative Gift to Support Cuesta College Music Students

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF ERIC JONLEY OLSEN**



Carol Olsen is honoring her late husband, Eric Jonley Olsen, through a gift that will leave a lasting impact on Cuesta College and its music students. After Eric's passing two years ago, Carol transformed her grief into a powerful tribute—one that brings together the two passions that defined Eric's life: education and music.

Eric was dedicated to helping others through education. A proud graduate of Morro Bay High School and Cal Poly University, he earned a Master's in Counseling and pursued a career in teaching. Over 35 years, he taught math and inspired countless students with his compassion, dedication, and belief in the power of learning. Known for meeting students where they were, Eric was a trailblazer who encouraged everyone, including women, to excel in math at a time when such encouragement was rare.

Eric's influence extended far beyond the mathematics classroom. His passion for music began early, evolving from creating playlists of top artists to joining a band in the 1960s. Throughout his life, he played a variety of genres, from rock and disco to country, always valuing the joy of performing with others over formal practice. Music became a cornerstone of his life, fostering lasting friendships and eventually leading him to meet Carol, his wife of 37 years. Their shared love for music, adventurous travels, and commitment to community defined their life together.

Eric and Carol explored 75 countries together and embarked on 37 cruises, immersing themselves in diverse cultures, music, and dance. These experiences were profoundly interconnected for Eric, enriching each other and infusing his life with vibrancy and joy.

Eric's love of music legacy lives on today through Carol's generous giving to Cuesta College. The Carol L. and Eric Jonley Olsen Applied Music Education

Endowment supports the next generation of music students, providing the resources needed for their dreams to thrive. This legacy funds 50 private music lessons annually, offering one-on-one mentorship crucial for artistic growth. Students specializing in voice, piano, strings, guitar, woodwinds, brass, and percussion benefit from focused instruction to help them excel in their craft.

"Thanks to the Carol L. and Eric Jonley Olsen Applied Music Education Endowment, I've received personalized music lessons that have completely transformed my skills," shares Hero, a Cuesta College music student. "In high school, I had a limited approach to playing music, but my applied music teacher showed me how to grow as a musician by learning from the techniques of others."

Carol and Eric's connection to Cuesta College began when they attended concerts and performances, becoming part of their vibrant cultural community. To honor Eric's love for music, the Cuesta College Recording Studio now bears his name, serving as a lasting tribute. Carol's generosity also extends to supporting the Harold J. Miossi Cultural and Performing Arts Center (CPAC), where her sponsorship helps enrich students and the broader community through concerts, performances, and festivals.

In his final days, Eric reflected on his life and said he had "the time of his life." The band Green Day's song "Good Riddance" resonated deeply with him, encapsulating his joy in living.

Carol Olsen's generosity is a testament to the profound impact that one person's commitment can have. Through her support, Eric's spirit inspires future generations of Cuesta College students to make their musical dreams come true.

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*We are deeply saddened to share that between the writing of this article and the printing of the magazine, we learned of Carol's unexpected passing. Their legacies will live on at Cuesta College.*

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR ADVANCEMENT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Shannon Hill



Students at Cuesta College can't do it without you!

It's an all-encompassing statement, but absolutely true. With your help, the students here are fighting to build their future, and the future of our community, as individuals and families are uplifted by your passion to give.

Romantic views of the 'poor' college student eating ramen noodles has been replaced by the reality of the obstacles of homelessness, food insecurity, and lack of basic needs like healthcare – or even internet services. Many of our students are successful without having to deal with these issues, but an increasing number are working through one or more of these challenges while taking care of family members as well.

You are their margin of success.

The Foundation team is here to ensure your gift makes the most impact. Working with our partners in Financial Aid, Instruction, Basic Needs and other departments, we can identify not just individual students' needs, but also projects that are building up entire student groups. The Cuesta Fund in particular gives us the opportunity to send funds from the area of greatest need to our colleagues with programs making the most impact on campus.

We are here and available to bring the next big idea in student success into a reality!

**Shannon Hill,**  
Advancement Executive Director

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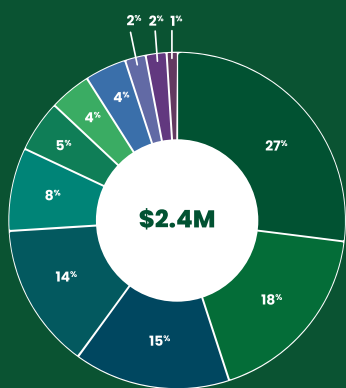
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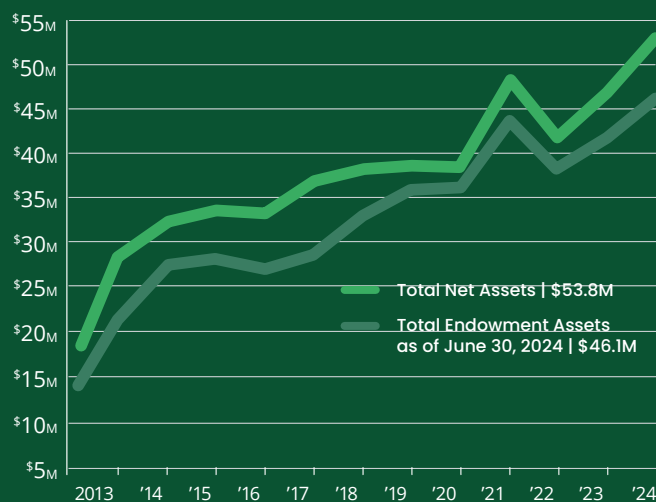
2023–2024

# \$2.4 Million Raised



### What does the \$2.4M raised support?

- 27% Scholarships
- 18% Endowments
- 15% Area of Greatest Need
- 15% Aviation
- 8% Arts and Humanities
- 5% Nursing
- 4% Athletics
- 4% Community Programs
- 2% North County Campus
- 2% Student Services
- 1% Engineering and Technology



1,175

students receiving support in 2023–24



\$1.1 M

support for programs



\$1.39 M

support for students

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDATION BOARD PRESIDENT

# Robert M. “Grigger” Jones



As we celebrate the 51st Anniversary of the Cuesta College Foundation, I am immensely grateful for the profound impact we have made together over more than five decades. The Foundation has consistently promoted and advanced the success of Cuesta College and its students. Your support today reaffirms our shared commitment to ensuring this beloved institution's continued growth and prosperity.

The Cuesta College Foundation has been at the heart of providing financial support to students pursuing their educational and career aspirations. From the Cuesta Promise Scholarship to annual and endowed scholarships and emergency awards, we have extended a lifeline to countless students. In the 2023–24 academic year alone, we awarded 587 scholarships totaling \$522,558, and for the first time in our history, our direct financial support to students surpassed \$1 million.

Beyond scholarships, the Cuesta College Foundation awarded \$160,000 in grants across twenty requests, directly benefiting a range of programs, including Performing Arts, Fine Arts, Biology, Athletics, Student Success, Student Development, Library Resources, Social Sciences, Engineering and Technology, and Community Programs. These grants significantly enhance both the educational experience for our students and the effectiveness of the programs that support their success.

Additionally, \$36,000 was gifted to the college to fund professional development, foster innovation and motivation, and provide emergency assistance for students in need.

As we look ahead, our mission remains as vibrant as ever. We are committed to continuing this legacy of support for Cuesta College's students, programs, and community for years to come.

On behalf of the Cuesta College Foundation Board of Directors, I extend my most profound appreciation to each of you for your unwavering support. Together, we create lasting change, enrich lives, and empower students to achieve their dreams.

Thank you for being an integral part of this extraordinary journey.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Grigger Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

**Grigger Jones,**  
Foundation Board President  
Cuesta College Foundation Board of Directors



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